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parasites on the bark of large trees in the forests of inter-tropical regions. These are called epiphyte orchids; the others, which derive their nourishment from the soil, are called terrestrial orchids.

The epiphyte orchids are the most beautiful ornament of those arches formed by the gigantic trees of the hottest countries in the continents of the Old and New World. The shade and moist warmth are particularly favourable to their mode of growth. In all the cold and temperate climates of the European continent, the oaks and beech-trees of the forests cover their bark with mosses and lichens; in tropical climates, on the contrary, trees of every variety of form and size are covered with orchids, forming, immediately after the rainy season, which takes the place of winter, lovely garlands rich in colour and delicious in perfume. These charms, of which nothing in Europe can give any adequate idea, last unimpaired for several months.

The splendid flowering of the orchid tribe is an object of admiration even to the savage tribes of our land. When the Spaniards penetrated for the first time into the thinly-peopled districts of Central America, they were struck to see the huts in the villages covered with magnificent orchids, principally belonging to the genus *Laelia*, the flowers of which are very much elongated; and this kind of decoration subsists at the present day. Many orchids are provided with particular organs which are neither branches nor roots, but are called aerial roots, because they strike out into the air in all directions and derive part of the nourishment of the plant from the atmosphere. The long duration of the flowering of orchids arises from the tardy action of the reproductive organs. Fertilisation is carried on very slowly; indeed it is often not fully accomplished at all. The corolla, which constitutes what is generally the coloured part of the flower, does not fade until fertilisation has been completed, and when this is not done the corolla may last two or three times the length of the ordinary time. Thus in European green-houses it is sometimes rather difficult to get orchids to flower; but when this is effected, all efforts are amply repaid by the extraordinary duration of their flowering time. When cultivated in hot-houses under the influence of a very warm and at the same time moist atmosphere, orchids rarely produce fertile seeds; yet instances of multiplication by seeds produced under such circumstances have occurred within a few years both in England and in Ireland. The greater part of orchids can only be propagated by the separation of their rhizomes, which are bulbous stems rooting into the ground and each capable of producing a complete plant. When we consider the numerous difficulties and dangers involved in penetrating wild forests and unhealthy regions to obtain new orchids, it is not surprising that these beautiful plants should always fetch a high price in Europe. There are some wealthy amateurs who pay enormous sums for them.

A year or two ago, Mr. Henderson, a horticulturist, succeeded in getting an orchid, of the genus *Cattleya*, to flower

for the first time in Europe. A wealthy English duke went, according to custom, to inspect his conservatories, accompanied by a young lady of his family, who was passionately fond of flowers, and whose admiration was riveted by the new *Cattleya*, which surpassed anything of the kind she had ever seen. The duke, going to Mr. Henderson, pointed to the flower, and asked the price. In vain did Mr. Henderson protest that he did not wish to sell it at any price, that it was the only thing of the sort in Europe, and that he was unwilling to part with it to anybody till he had first propagated it. The imperturbable duke, holding out a pocket-book full of bank-notes, replied to all his protestations by simply asking the price. At length the horticulturist, weary of the contest, consented to accept a large sum and allow the duke's fair companion to carry off the plant. We do not feel at liberty to state the exact amount; suffice it to say, it was as much as it would take a clever workman several years to earn.

Though travellers had for many years spoken highly of the singular organisation, beauty, and fragrance of epiphyte orchids, it was not till thirty years ago that horticulturists in England knew how to cultivate and propagate them with success. One of the first to overcome the difficulties in the way was the late Mr. Cattley, from whom the plant just mentioned derived its name. British skill and perseverance soon met with their due reward, and orchids are now raised by cultivation to a degree of perfection altogether surpassing that which belongs to their natural condition. While before 1820 scarcely any English garden could produce twenty distinct species of this tribe, some of the nurserymen near London can now exhibit more than a thousand. What cultivation has done for roses, dahlias, tulips, and other flowers, has been accomplished with equal success in the case of this remarkable and beautiful tribe. They have been rendered much more productive, so as to contain twenty or thirty blossoms on a cluster, while in their natural state they bore only two or three. They have also been made to assume much larger proportions, a richer fragrance, more glowing colours, and a more beautiful aspect altogether.

The plant represented in our engraving (p. 69) is, as the reader will see, an *Acinetum*, an orchid only lately introduced into Europe, and still rare even in the finest collections. Like many of the genera *Dendrobium*, *Stanhopea*, and the *Aerids*, the flower-stalk of the *Acinetum* does not spring upwards from below, but in the contrary direction. In its native region its flowers hang in garlands all along the trunk of the tree on which the plant lives as a parasite.

One advantage of cultivating orchids is, that, as they flower at various seasons, the possessor of a moderate collection may expect always to have some in flower, no matter what is the time of the year. Hence it is not mere caprice that renders them objects of so much favour among opulent amateurs. They are worthy to be prized on several accounts, especially the care and skill required to preserve them in a flourishing condition.

THE DEAD BRIDAL.

A VENETIAN TALE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

BY JONATHAN FREKE SLINGSBY.

CHAPTER XX.

THE hours of night wore slowly and wearily onward for the principal inmates of the Palazzo Polani. The count paced to and fro in the great *salone*, for he was too agitated to seek the repose of his chamber. He had struggled to the last against the fate that seemed about to bear him down and to crush him; and now he looked up at the portraits of his ancestors that hung from the walls, and felt that the glory was about to depart from his house. True it was, there was still one mode left of averting ruin, but from this he shrank with the instinct of his aristocratic nature; and even when he had

at times subdued his pride, and schooled himself to look with tolerable tranquillity upon the alliance for his ward, the memory of his dearest and truest friend would cross his spirit, and the features of the dead would appear to his mind's vision, looking with reproachful sadness upon him, and asking him how he could betray a solemn trust, and outrage the feelings of the child committed to his care. Then, too, the horror with which Bianca heard the proposition came upon him, and wrung his heart with a pang of remorse and shame. And so his feelings alternated and swayed him to and fro, till at one

time he determined to save himself at any price, even at that of compelling Bianca to accept her suitor, and at another resolved to hazard all rather than force her to a distasteful, and worse still, a degrading union.

Another chamber was tenanted by one more wretched still—Bianca Morosini. Hour after hour she watched for the return of Giulio. Hour after hour the hope, faint as it was even at first, which sustained her, became less and less. Midnight came, but with it no Giulio. She had long since dismissed her attendant; and even old Giudetta, though she had entreated for permission to spend the night with her mistress, who she saw was seriously indisposed, had unwillingly withdrawn, and so the girl was left to her own wretchedness. How wretched that night was we may not say; how deep its gloom; how full of terror, and agony, and bewildering thoughts, and conflicting feelings, and passionate grief, and then dull, heavy, despairing apathy supervening for a season, and, as it were, swallowing up all emotions. And so morning found the girl sitting in her night-robés, without having sought a respite in sleep even for a moment. The gray of morning brightened into day—a sweet, sunny day; whose light came as if to mock her sorrow—but with it Giulio came not. Old Giudetta stole on tip-toe into her lady's room, and found her even as she had left her the night before.

"Santissima Virgine! my dear child, how is this?" she exclaimed. "You have not lain down during the night. You are ill, very ill, I fear, and something has discomposed you. Come, you must take rest for a while."

But the girl resisted all the entreaties of her nurse, and with a strong effort concealed her feelings. To disclose even to her faithful attendant the position in which she was placed was revolting to her pride.

"I am not quite well, dear nurse, but I doubt not that thou canst find amongst thy potions something that will do me good."

"Ah, yes, that can I," said the old woman; and she hurried away from the room, but speedily returned with glass and bottle.

"Here, my dear lady, take this essence, and then compose yourself for a few minutes."

The girl took the draught, and smiling kindly on the old woman, lay back on the couch on which she had been sitting. Giudetta's potion was a strong narcotic, which, seeing that remonstrance was unavailing, she wisely administered. In a few moments her young mistress sank into a deep sleep. It was long past midday when she awoke. She felt weary and unrefreshed, with a sense of intolerable depression about the region of the heart. She was hot and her skin felt dry, while the light even of the darkened chamber was painful to her languid eyes. Giudetta sat beside her watching her intently. Bianca made a movement as if to rise, but the other gently restrained her.

"You must be quiet, dear child, a little longer. Your pulse is quick and your eye is heavy. Compose yourself again."

"Has the count inquired for me?"

"No, indeed, dear child, so you need not be uneasy."

"Did he not note my absence in the morning?"

"In truth, his lordship has not been in the palace since daybreak."

"And Giulio?"

"Tomaso says he has not been at home since yester-even; belike he has spent the night with some of his friends. But you must not speak more just now."

Bianca felt now that all hope of Giulio's obtaining the money was at an end; then came a vague terror and sense of calamity at his protracted absence, and she fancied a thousand accidents which might have befallen him, for she well knew he would not now be voluntarily absent from her. Her head became confused, and she felt unable to follow continuously the train of sad thought; fantasies, the most incongruous and horrible, were ever mixing themselves up with the realities of her position; thus she lay half waking, half slumbering, while the dry, burning heat of her lips and tongue increased, and

throughout all she had a sense of a pricking pain in her bosom near the shoulder. So the day wore on, till it was within less than an hour of sunset. A low tap was heard at the door of the chamber. Giudetta stepped softly across the room, and then Bianca heard voices whispering earnestly as if in contention.

"Impossible, Giovanna, tell his lordship she is too ill."

"Nay, mistress Giudetta, you had better bear the message to him yourself; I don't much care to meet him in his present mood. He is snapping at every one like a wolf. He has cuffed Antonio for I know not what, and Tomaso says he is worse than the Grand Turk."

"Silence thy prating tongue, jade. Well, I will go myself, and do thou sit quietly on yonder stool and watch thy young mistress; but let not a word pass thy lips, chatterbox."

It was not long before Giudetta returned to the chamber; she was pale with anger and shaking with excitement, and quite forgetting the necessity for silence which she had peremptorily enjoined upon Giovanna, she gave utterance to her feelings in no gentle voice.

"Holy Virgin guard us! I believe my lord has lost his senses outright. 'Where is the signora Bianca?' said he when I entered, 'has she received my message?' 'No, eccellenza,' said I. 'No!' cried he, turning short upon me, 'who dared to withhold it?' 'I did, eccellenza; my lady is ill, and unable to rise.' Then the count ground his teeth, and glared upon me like a wild beast. 'Hark ye, Mistress Giudetta,' says he in a hissing voice, 'I am in no mood to be trifled with. Tell your young lady, that if she have life; she must attend me in this room at sunset. If she is ill,' says he with a sigh, 'I am sorry for it; but tell her she may not refuse, even on that score—she shall have time enough to nurse her ailments afterwards. Go now, and see on your peril that I am obeyed.'"

"He shall be obeyed," said Bianca, with sudden energy; for the loud speaking of Giudetta had thoroughly aroused her from her stupor, and the fever in her blood lent her an unnatural strength. "I will rise, my good nurse, thou shalt aid Giovanna at my toilette. Thine arm, Giudetta."

And the girl sat upright while the two women arrayed her; but even as the old woman stole a frightened glance at her young lady's face, she turned pale with alarm, for her dull eye was fixed, and yet withal there was a strange wildness in it which she had never seen before. All this time the girl spoke not, but at intervals she pressed her hand over her heart and sighed deeply, as one oppressed with pain. At length her toilette was completed, and she stood erect in her ghastly loveliness, leaning on the arms of her attendants; thus supported, she left her chamber and proceeded to the grand *salone*. With a fixed abstracted gaze and a heavy step, as one who walks in a dream, she moved slowly up the apartment, and sat down upon a couch of crimson velvet. At a sign, the attendants departed, and she was left alone in the vast and silent room.

Meantime, in the ante-chamber beyond, another scene was enacting. Punctual to the appointed hour, Pietro Molo, attended by a young man, entered the hall of the Palazzo Polani, and both were ushered into the presence of the count. The old goldsmith moved up the room with that air of quiet respect and self-possession which were habitual to him: the youth followed behind him.

"I am come, eccellenza," said the senior, declining the seat to which the count silently motioned him, "according to the tenor of our agreement contained in this obligation (and he held forth the bond). If it is your lordship's pleasure to pay me the loan this day due, with the interest thereon, which I have calculated, I shall be happy to receive it, and write you an acquittance."

"Ser Pietro Molo," said the count, measuring his words as he spoke, "I have endeavoured by every means in my power to procure the money to satisfy your claim. I have three thousand ducats, and no more. If you will receive that sum and the ample security I can give you for the residue, I am prepared to pay it."

"Five thousand ducats, principal money, my lord, and five hundred, the interest at ten per centum. These sums I demand —your excellency will excuse me if I decline to take less."

The count made one appeal more.

"This youth is your nephew, I presume, Ser Molo."

"Girolamo, my brother Jacopo's son, so please your lordship," said the banker, motioning the youth to come forward.

The count surveyed him anxiously. He was a good-looking youth, dressed in a simple suit of black cloth, over which he wore his cloak, set on very primly. He had an ingenuous and modest air, but he stooped somewhat in the shoulders, and kept his eyes demurely fixed on the ground.

"As I understood from you originally, that this money belonged to your nephew, I now apply to him to know if he will be content with the terms that I offer."

The young man was about to speak, but the elder Molo thrust him aside with an impatient and peremptory gesture, and took upon himself the response.

"I told you, sir count, that the money was my brother's, sent to me to employ in a speculation for his son's use. For that speculation I alone am answerable. I feel bound to replace it, if there be any loss; and I am, therefore, alone competent to accept or decline your terms. I decline them, my lord, and now I look for the fulfilment of your stipulation. My nephew is here to receive the hand of your ward, which, on his behalf, I claim."

The Count Polani fixed on the old banker a stern and haughty gaze, in which pride and anger seemed struggling with a sense of helplessness. At first he seemed about to give vent to his passion; but there was that in the calm yet respectful bearing with which old Molo met his look, that quickly showed the count the necessity of keeping a guard upon his temper. Mastering his emotion with a strong effort, he replied,

"You shall see the Signora Morosini herself. Follow me."

The count stepped forward to the door which separated the anti-chamber from the *salone*, and throwing it open, he entered the latter followed by his two visitors. Without uttering a word, they walked slowly up the room to where Bianca was sitting in the same state of strange abstraction in which her attendants had left her.

At that moment the last rays of the setting sun streamed through the amber-tinted glass in the western window, and the soft warm light fell upon the massive clusters of her light-brown hair, till they looked like the rippling waters when the sunlight tips their edges with gold. And then the light streamed athwart her pallid cheek, and down her snowy neck, playing upon them as one sees it play upon a marble statue, illuminating without warming the white surface, which looks all the whiter and colder and more lifeless from the contrast. Thus sat the girl, passionless, unmoving, almost serene, in her solemn and sad loveliness—a thing admirable, and yet terrible and painful to look upon.

The count started at the changed appearance of the girl. He expected to see her look ill, but he was not prepared for the sight which he now encountered. It was a moment before he recovered his composure sufficiently to address himself to the task that was before him; but he had already staked too much on the terrible game to withdraw, and so he was forced to play it out. He moved up gently to the maiden, and taking her hand he said kindly:

"Here is one who seeks to make his suit to you, dear signora. You are already advised of his visit, and that he has my permission to address you."

The girl started, as if the words fell upon her ear with a sense of undefined pain, as the voice of the mesmeriser might fall upon one in a magnetic trance. A strange, fitful lustre lit up her dull eye; the look became fixed, dilated, and wild, while the orb was suffused with a red hue that added to the wildness. She half rose from the couch, and her lips moved as if she were about to speak, when a cold shivering ran through her frame, and shook her as the wind shakes the corn in autumn. She placed her hand upon her bosom, and

uttering a feeble cry of anguish, she sank back upon the seat. In a moment the attendants were summoned to her aid. Giovanna wrung her own hands, and kissed those of her young mistress, whom she really loved; while old Giudetta, with more presence of mind, after gazing into the eyes of the girl and feeling her fluttering pulse, suddenly tore down her robe from off her neck, and directing her examination to the spot where Bianca's hand was placed, she discovered a small dark pustule raised above the skin, and surrounded with a circle of bright red. Uttering a shriek of horror, she sprang backwards and cried out,

"The plague! the plague!"

The terrible announcement paralysed every one for a moment. The count was the first to recover his presence of mind. He bent down over the girl, and looked at the place to which Giudetta pointed. There was the fatal mark, the ominous crimson carbuncle which no one who has ever seen the plague-spot can mistake.

"Aye, the plague! the plague!" he exclaimed, "as surely as there is a God in heaven!"

Then losing all control of himself, he burst into a passion of grief, such as strong men sometimes give way to. He kissed the lips of the girl now flushed and burning, and then stepping rapidly back to where old Molo and his nephew stood silent and awe-struck, he exclaimed, with a wild and mocking laugh:—

"Look there! look there! Messer Molo. Young man, thou wouldst seek a noble one to mate with? Is she not here, as noble and as fair as thine eyes can desire! Come, why dost thou tarry? I will lead thee to her. Yes, thou mayest take the hand of the dying! A bridal! a DEAD BRIDAL! Wilt thou claim thy bride now?"

As the count spoke thus madly, he made a gesture to Girolamo, as if inviting him to advance. The young man calmly stepped forward, as if about to take the hand of the now unconscious girl, when old Molo sprang after him, and seized him by the arm.

"Forbear, boy! Are you mad? Move not another step, I charge you, as you value your life.—It cannot be, it cannot be, I say.—Do you not see it is the will of Heaven?—Come, let us go hence; what business have we here now?" As he spoke, the old banker forced his nephew backwards out of the house.

The plague was now indeed in the city of Venice—that terrible pestilence, whose ravages, not half a century before, was still in the recollection of many living. We shall not dwell upon the horrifying details of this loathly distemper: they have been delineated by more than one master hand. From the nature and situation of the city, the miasma spread wide and rapidly, notwithstanding all the sanitary precautions of the authorities, and the exertions of the officers of health. There was not a street, scarcely was there a house, in which some inmate did not fall a victim. All day long the city was as a city of the dead. All gaiety had disappeared; the streets and squares were empty; no one went forth save on the most pressing business, or to the churches; and then they passed hastily along in the middle of the street, shunning contact with their fellow-creatures. From morning till night, prayers and supplications were offered up in all the churches; the host was carried about in solemn procession, with chanting and incense, seeking to appease the wrath of God; and at night the dead-boat passed along the canals; and ever and anon it stopped at a slip, or stair-foot, or at a bridge; and the low bell was rung, and the living hurriedly brought forth their dead, themselves pale, and horror-stricken, and ghastly; and, with scant ceremony, and a prayer muttered low and short, they placed the corpse in the dead-boat, and then it passed on, to receive other dead, till it was filled with its festering burthen, and would hold no more. And so the malady raged through the spring, and summer, and autumn, till twenty thousand souls were swept away within the City of the Lagunes.